



**Start of Jews and Germans, Fifty
Years after the Holocaust :**

AR 11818

Sys #: 000393857

LEO BAECK INSTITUTE
Center for Jewish History

15 West 16th Street
New York, NY 10011

Phone: (212) 744-6400
Fax: (212) 988-1305
Email: lbaeck@lbi.cjh.org
URL: <http://www.lbi.org>



AR 11818

1/1

Jews and Germans, Fifty Years after the Holocaust

1993

Archives

JEWS AND GERMANS, FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

A SYMPOSIUM

Fifty years after the Holocaust, re-united Germany is again the most powerful state in Europe. The fall of communism and the demise of the East German state has put to test the democratic and liberal stability and integrity of Germany. Unification has created enormous economic, social and psychological difficulties, which, bound together with the generation gap and time lapse since the destruction of European Jewry in World War II, render relevance to a re-examination of the different aspects of relations between Jews and Germans.

A detailed questionnaire was composed by GESHER, the Journal on Jewish Affairs, published under the auspices of the World Jewish Congress, in Israel, and presented to Jewish intellectuals, academics, and experts from Israel and abroad. (See Appendix)

The symposium was published in Hebrew in the current issue of Gesher, #127-128/Winter 1993. This is a concise English version of the responses received.

GESHER is edited by Dr. Shlomo Shafir.

The synopsis of the symposium has been translated and edited by Ms. Simona Kedmi, Assistant Editor.*

Executive Director of the World Jewish Congress in Israel is Dr. Avi Beker.

*Note: Most of the full texts of the symposium are available in English. For further information, contact S.Kedmi.

Jerusalem, December 1993



PROFESSOR ELIEZER SCHWEID
Hebrew University, Jerusalem

It is difficult to accept this reality, but the expected is happening in perhaps unpredicted speed: the memory of the Holocaust is gradually ceasing to be a factor which influences national policy, in Germany as well as in Israel. However, it does seem that the memory of the Holocaust still carries crucial weight in shaping the special relations between the Jewish people and Germany. The signing of the Shilumim (Indemnification) Agreement between the State of Israel and Germany at such an early stage, long before the Jewish people were truly prepared in terms of the process of internal confrontation with the Shoah and its consequences, and long before the German people had acquired sufficient consciousness of its guilt, accelerated the creation of a gap between the myth which so many professed and the spiritual process which it was meant to create. In particular, the signing of the agreement weakened the prospect that the memory would be transmitted to future generations as a behavior-shaping factor of decisive importance. The question is what is the impact of national conscience in shaping national policy when there is no other, more tangible interest to support it. Therefore, it seems that there is not enough reason for extensive efforts in information dissemination which will attempt to overcome the "normalization" process that is taking place between Germany and the Jewish people, since these will fail to achieve their goal.

With respect to the "universalization" of the Holocaust, I believe that we should be well aware that if we wish to effectively combat Holocaust Denial and the obliteration of its memory among the nations, we will have to forego the effort to prove that the Holocaust was a totally unique phenomenon, having to do with the extraordinary fate of the Jewish people. First, there is no chance that such an effort will succeed to convince many, beyond a very limited circle of Christian leadership which has developed a supreme religious-moral sensitivity. Secondly, such an effort will damage the credibility of the assumptions on which the fight against denial is based, namely: a. that the Shoah was an event in the history of mankind, especially in the history of Western nations, and not only in the history of the two nations, the Jewish and the German; b. that the Shoah exposed the potential for moral distortion and collapse, which is relevant to modern history.

One must understand that a living memory serves as a metaphor; it continues to exist only if it is continued to be used. Of course, the Shoah was inflicted by men against the Jews alone, and not only because of a special hatred for Jews as Jews, but because of a unique total hatred reserved for Jews alone, a hatred which is incomparable to all other hatreds of other religious or ethnic persecuted minorities. Emphasizing the uniqueness of the Shoah, to Gentiles, will seem as an expression of egotism and insensitivity toward the sufferings of other nations. It is completely justified that the educational system in Israel and in the Diaspora teach the Shoah with emphasis on its exclusively Jewish uniqueness. We must, however, accept the fact that the universalization of the consciousness of the Shoah must inevitably entail the universalization of the Shoah itself, and as a result, more than one authentic and exclusive memory will be formed.

When the Indemnification Agreement was signed, a distinction was made between "official state" relations and relations between two peoples. One must admit that this distinction was a form of apologetics. For future generations this argumentation will not hold, and will even seem absurd: it is impossible to uphold normal "state" relations, which have a wide range of normal behavioral expressions, and yet prevent full openness in the relations between the real people of whom the states are composed.

Involvement of Jewish institutions representing the Jewish people or the State of Israel in what is happening today in Germany, after its unification, vis-a-vis increasing xenophobia, is justified in its very essence. Such Jewish and Israeli involvement is obligatory when it comes to exerting pressure with regard to possible consequences of German national interests on Middle East politics.

Attempts to mash together the memory of the Shoah and criticism of the Israeli position concerning the Palestinian conflict, should be firmly rejected, just as the justification of the Israeli position

should not be based on the memory of the Shoah. Involving this memory can be justified only in the event that racism and anti-Semitism become a part of the conflict.

The existence and flourishing of a Jewish community in Germany after the Holocaust seems to me an expression of a deep, spiritual perversion. I am incapable of understanding its reestablishment after the Holocaust. I see no Israeli or other material interest in the existence of such a community. It is rather an offence to the self-image of the Jewish people.

From an overall historical perspective, the rise of the new nationalistic conservatism in Germany is a most dangerous phenomenon, against which the crux of criticism should be aimed.

ISI LEIBLER

Chairman of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Co-Chairman of World Jewish Congress Governing Board

It is difficult to visualize personal relations between Jews and Germans ever being absolutely normal, as too much blood has flowed and memories of the Holocaust will inevitably intrude. But it is imperative for Jews - and in particular Israelis - to acknowledge and welcome younger generations of Germans who seek to develop a new dialogue based on a recognition of the past. Relations between Jews and Germans will always be overshadowed by memories of the Holocaust, but as long as successive generations of Germans are prepared to confront and admit their nation's responsibility for the Shoah, there will be progress and the possibility of forging new positive relationships.

I am troubled by the orgy of construction of highly expensive Holocaust museums around the Diaspora. In years to come, if current demographic trends of intermarriage in North America and Europe continue, many of these museums will only be viewed by gentile audiences. Under these circumstances, the trend will be towards identifying the Holocaust with other human rights violations and minimizing the unique Jewish aspect. This is to be regretted. Hence, greater efforts should be directed toward further developing YAD VASHEM in Jerusalem.

Basically, all Jews, whether Israeli or from the Diaspora, cannot help seeing Germany but through the lens of the Holocaust, yet as long as German leaders remain committed to making amends, Israel should seek to develop normal relations with them. However, when anti-Semitism rears its head, relations with Jews and Israelis will invariably be affected. With regard to criticism of Israel's policies, Germany has a stronger obligation to be cautious, particularly when one witnesses the obscene comparison by some European spokesmen that Israeli treatment of the Palestinians is akin to Nazism.

As for the existence of a Jewish community in Germany, I find it difficult to understand. Today, German Jewry is emerging as a community comprising, in the main, of migrants emanating from the former Soviet Union. I believe there is something wrong about this and I cannot subscribe to the argument that their presence is a triumph against Hitlerism.

As for Austria, I believe Diaspora Jews should distance themselves from involvement with that nation. There can be no progress until Austrians, like the German people, confront the events of the Nazi era.

A revival of an extreme right-wing conservative movement in the s is more dangerous than skinheads and other hooligans indulging in violence and identifying themselves as Nazis.



PROFESSOR ALFRED GOTTSCHALK

President, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati

The question pertaining to the development of relations between Jews and Germans is a most ironical one. One speaks here not of equals but of a violated nation, namely the Jewish nation whose sons and daughters, whose entire families have been killed off in that terrible dark night of horror we call the Holocaust. Counterpoised with this nation is the German nation, rebuilt, restored and, yes, even refortified. The Jewish people in Germany are more akin to a new generation of refugees who must not feel themselves to be secure to any great degree. Even in the best of times they do not feel as if they belong to the newly reconstituted unified German nation.

On the personal level, Jews must retain a dis-ease and the feeling of not belonging, even ostracism, from those levels of power and society in which Jews at one time moved more easily than they do today. Hardly any of them feel that their responsibility extends to anything more than perhaps the restoration of some memorials, museums and public buildings.

The new generation of skinheads, the new Nazis that have drifted as jetsam and flotsam on top of turbulent waters, are symptomatic of the generic disease which besets Germans, namely anti-Semitism, the hatred of foreigners, xenophobia and their distrust of the Eastern Europeans. The new racism is only the old racism in a new guise.

The impact of the time factor on the lessons of the Holocaust will tend, in a general sense, to dilute the memory in the next generation. It will take educational activity of great seriousness and magnitude to keep the memory of the Shoah alive.

The uniqueness of the Shoah can perhaps be preserved best for others through its inevitable universalization. The number of people interested in the "Jewish Holocaust" will diminish unless the Jewish Holocaust can indeed be made to serve as a universal symbol of what can happen to anyone, when civilization lets down its barrier and the animalistic aspects of the human are permitted free reign.

German criticism that was voiced in Europe regarding the territories and Israel's position concerning the Palestinians represented a legitimate concern. Still, such criticism should always be carefully guarded and never threaten Israel and its security in any way. Germany has no moral right to do that.

I do not believe the relationship between Jews and Germans can ever be truly normal, although they can be viable. I do not believe a viable Jewish community either opposes nor abets the interests of Israel and the Jewish people.

Any meaningful Jewish existence in Germany is counter-indicated by the fact that the soil of Germany is so soaked with Jewish blood that it will take generations to normalize relationships between Germany and the Jewish people.

I should like to state that my persistent pessimism about the relationships between Germans and Jews, Israel and Germany, and the Jews of the Diaspora and Germany reflects the realities today. Life in Germany, Austria and other parts of Europe, and especially France, will become much more difficult for Jews in the years to come.



PROFESSOR MICHAEL MEYER

Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati

International President, Leo Baeck Institute (New York, London, Jerusalem)

It is grossly ironic how the intellectual elite of German society now feels bereft of the Jewish community that once lived in its midst. Whereas before the Holocaust, Jewish studies hardly existed in German universities, today there is scarcely a university that does not include them in its offering of courses.

It is difficult for me to understand how Jews can make Germany their home. Those who do, with few exceptions, have no roots or interest in the community that was destroyed. They sojourn in Germany for the sake of material benefit, but they do not feel at home. Nor can their presence be seen as a normalization of the relations between Germans and Jews. It is still much too early for that. Normalization can come, if at all, only when the generation of murderers and survivors has fully died out. When memory becomes entirely second-hand, it may be possible to speak of normalization, though never of memory's eradication.

The State of Israel bears moral responsibility only to itself and to God, not to any foreign nation. That is not to say that other nations are not entitled to express their views on Israeli policies, but they, especially Germany and Austria, have no claim to a higher morality. Only the State of Israel on its own can hold itself to a more severe standard, thereby, and with justifiable self-satisfaction, handing Nazism yet another defeat.

PROFESSOR SHLOMO ARONSON

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Relations between Germans and Jews will remain very charged and will continue to engage the two peoples in the future in many areas, even if not in the same intensity. There is no "Jewish Problem" in Germany, as was in the generations before the Holocaust, and it has no concrete expression in every-day life of the Germans. Many of them, especially the younger generations, will consider it a difficult issue, but they will try to exonerate themselves. The shadow of the past will seem to many as obliging Germany to abstain from opting for exaggerated nationalism, not to speak of a return to chauvinism, and to do her utmost to integrate into a united Europe. However, the rapid unification, and the economic hardships which it entails, as well as concessions of German sovereignty in the economic sphere, which are an unavoidable consequence of European unification, will re-awaken the problem of a national German state vis-a-vis its integration into unified Europe.

This confrontation will bring about a review of German history, at least on the part of those intellectuals who will seek to give a different substance to German identity. Politicians may see the problem of identity, linked with economic difficulties, as an opportunity, in order to completely shake off the "moral debt" that today's Germany holds toward the Jews. The revival of anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism in the united Germany is a variable which exists in the background, and which could also influence Germany's attitudes to Jews.

The Holocaust will continue to weigh on Germany in the next generation, but attempts of its denial and misleading neo-Nazi "universalization" will increase. The scientific community is well-equipped to deal with such offensives but the general public, not only in Germany, does not examine these publications in depth.

The Jewish community in Germany is not really a community, neither in size nor in the political sense. From the cultural aspect it does not exist and from the economic aspect it has as yet no unique significance, except in the city of Frankfurt.



The frontiers of normalization of relations between Jews and Germans will be determined by developments within Germany itself, as well as in Europe and the West at large. From the German perspective, these frontiers will be influenced by developments in our area, especially by the peace process. They will also be influenced by elements such as the Islamic fundamentalism, which is not a partner to the process.

DR. ABRAHAM PECK

American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati

The thought that survivors and their children have something in common with Germans, either the Nazi murderers or their children, is at first a repulsive thought. But soon the generation of the survivors and the oppressors will be gone, and the post-1945 generation of Germans and Jews will face a kind of "zero hour" of new beginnings and new opportunities.

The presence of a Jewish community in Germany has not in any manner allowed the Jewish world to improve its attitude toward the Federal Republic. Indeed, only with the unification of the two Germanies have Jews there learned how little acceptance they have earned among their German neighbors or their Israeli cousins.

What gave the Jews in Germany a sense of identity, in the face of their rejection of a German one, was the belief that they could play a decisive role in the often difficult relationship between Israel and the Federal Republic. Apparently that, too, was a misconception.

Perhaps it is the preoccupation with being perceived as "People of the Book", the Jews with the Five Books of Moses and the Germans with Mein Kampf, which has allowed Israel and Germany to develop, beyond reparations payments and a national admission of guilt, a kind of special relationship.

As for American Jewry, which claims a Jewish and an American identity, it is the least open, the least willing to explore the possibilities of developing a "special relationship" with this or any other Germany.

Now that the Cold War has lost its position as the key agenda item in the age of global politics a new and different German-American relationship is evolving, rooted partly in the past, but primarily based on the necessities of the future. The relationship between Germans and Jews, too, is headed somewhere else. The Holocaust however, is a nightmare that will not go away because American Jews will not let it. For nearly three decades, the Holocaust has been a firm fixture of American Jewish identity.

It is noteworthy to mention that Austria, the nation that for decades has cultivated the image of Nazism's "first victim", completely obscuring the fact that a high percentage of the personnel directly involved in the Final Solution was Austrian, and later elected Kurt Waldheim as president in an atmosphere of intense anti-Semitism, nevertheless has made significant strides in reversing this situation.

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the end of the Holocaust and the end of this most murderous of centuries, the question of a normal set of relationships between Germans and Jews seems an almost impossible aim. Neither Germans nor Jews have fully grasped the depth of their tragedies. Until they appreciate the depths of their human and moral losses, until humanity grasps the destructive nature of the Holocaust years, we do not deserve to hope for a better world.



PROFESSOR ARTHUR HERTZBERG
New York University, New York

The large problem in Germany and Austria today is the power of rightwing anti-foreign sentiment. In fact the recent manifestations of anti-Semitism do not stand on their own; they are part of a xenophobia that is ever becoming more rampant. Today, anti-Semitism is largely a metaphor, a rhetoric that can be used in the tidal wave of anti-foreignism which is now rising all over the world.

In the Diaspora there is less Jewish involvement in Germany and a more pronounced popular feeling of not regarding Germany as a comfortable place for vacation. These sentiments in the Diaspora will, no doubt, change over time, as the generation which helped make the Nazi regime die off, along with the Jews who remember that era from personal experience.

The next generation, those who do not bear personal guilt for the Holocaust, seem to me to be as free to have opinions on all political questions, as everyone else. They have as much right to support one or another of the factions in Israel, and to be as concerned or unconcerned about the Palestinians as Jews are, or Americans, or Frenchmen.

Fundamentally, I think the Jewish people have not yet assimilated the horrifying truth that Hitler won a large part of his war against the Jews. The Holocaust is not a living experience for the majorities among whom Jews live, at least not as personal guilt or as the remembered guilt of their fathers. For the future of the Jewish people in the next century, these are the determining relations and not our accounts with Germany.

PROFESSOR GEOFFREY ALDERMAN
Royal Holloway College, University of London

It seems inevitable that with the passage of time, the historic context of the Shoah will be blurred, and that its unique qualities will become less obvious; it will be increasingly regarded as simply one example of man's inhumanity to man. It will become very difficult to argue that Germany has any continuing 'special relationship' with Jews or with Israel, or any special obligation in this regard.

There is no special significance in the existence of a viable Jewish community in Germany. If Jews wish to live there, that is their business, an act of personal choice which has no greater importance.

There is no such thing as what might be termed "congenital" anti-Jewish prejudice: the Shoah was a product of its time, the awesome culmination of a trend, a most extreme example of human cruelty within a society under grave stress. It is of course gratifying that the Federal Republic has acknowledged the reality of the past, and irksome that the Austrian government has not done so to the same extent. World Jewry must continue to press the Austrians to a full confession of their part in the events of the 1930s and 1940s, but we must guard against this desirable aim becoming an obsession.

Since the re-establishment of the Jewish State was an indirect outcome of the Holocaust, the duty of reminding the world of the Shoah will devolve upon that state; but I doubt that it will enhance the status of Israel within the community of nations if such reminders are voiced too often or too loudly.

Israel has a special duty to articulate a distaste and to warn of the dangers of a resurgent nationalism both in Germany and in Austria. In this way, rather than through any form of "special pleading", the reality and memory of the Shoah will be preserved for future generations.

It is the very essence of a mature relationship between states that they may criticize each other whilst remaining on friendly terms. Such criticism, in Israel's case, is perfectly proper, provided it

does not lend itself as a tool for those who wish to undermine the very legitimacy of the re-establishment of a Jewish State.

In the long term, there is no reason why relations between Israel and World Jewry on the one hand, and Germans and the Federal Republic on the other, should not revert to a complete normalization.

PROFESSOR ERNST LUDWIG EHRlich

University of Basel, Switzerland

Head of the Continental European District of B'nai Brith

Fifty years after the Holocaust, there is a new German and Jewish generation. Therefore, the relationship between the Germans and the Jews has changed, and the integration of the Jewish post-war generation into German society is improving. However, there is a danger that in the next generation, the importance of the Holocaust and the consciousness of the German people will diminish.

As the Jewish people are one, there should be relations with Germany from all sides, from Israelis and the Jews in the Diaspora. German criticism of Israeli policy has been limited and Germany has rather been a strong supporter of Israel within the European community.

A viable Jewish community exists in Germany, with good relations with its surrounding non-Jewish society. A strong Jewish community in Germany is in the interest of Israel and the Jewish people, if this Jewish community lives according to Jewish values.

Austria is doing everything to improve the relations with the State of Israel and with the Jews in Austria. The German political parties, especially the SPD and the CDU, know quite well that they have to deliver the message of the past to the future generation. The German political foundations, especially the Ebert and the Adenauer Foundations, are doing a lot to secure that the German, the Jewish and the Israeli people are brought together for a dialogue, so that the future will be a better one.



APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How do you envisage the development of relations between Jews and Germans on the eve of the new century: on the personal level, the organized public level and between the different generations?
2. What in your view will be the impact of the time factor on the lessons of the Holocaust, in the next generation? How can the uniqueness of the Shoah be preserved in face of the trend to give the Holocaust a universal dimension?
3. To what extent, if at all, can a distinction be made between the attitude of the Israeli public and the Diaspora towards Germany and the state level of relations between the State of Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany today? Is there room for continued involvement of Diaspora Jewry and especially that of American Jewry, in events taking place within Germany, with regard to lessons drawn from the Holocaust?
4. In your view, what are the legitimate limits of German criticism, as part of the general criticism in Europe, regarding the situation in the territories and Israel's position concerning the fate and future of the Palestinians? (This question was posed before the breakthrough in the Israel-Palestinian relations, September 1993).
5. Does the existence of a viable Jewish community in Germany signify acceptance of the normalization of relations? Does it suit or oppose the interests of Israel and the Jewish people?
6. How should Jews in Israel and the Diaspora cope with the reality in Austria, whose establishment and public have dealt with their Nazi past to a much lesser degree than the Germans of the Federal Republic?
7. From an historical perspective, what in your opinion is of greater concern, overt neo-Nazi anti-Semitic bodies or the revival of a rightist, nationalistic conservatism in both Austria and Germany?
8. What are the bounds of normalization of relations between Germans, on the one hand, and Israel and the Jews, on the other hand, in the next generation?



**End of Jews and Germans, Fifty
Years after the Holocaust :**

